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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Monday, April 16, 1934.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY.)

Subject: "Canned Tomatoes." Information from Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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At last I have met the Compleat Pessimist. He is a beetle-browed gentleman who sells groceries. And does he admire women shoppers? He most assuredly does not!

With my market basket on my arm, I was looking over the canned goods when he came along to help -- "that is," he said in a hopeless tone, "if you have any idea what you want."

I told him I'd be much obliged if he'd sell me a half dozen cans of tomatoes. He put the cans on the counter. "What else?" he asked.

"Just a minute," I said, as pleasantly as possible. "What grade tomatoes are these?" They weren't labeled. I couldn't tell whether they were Fancy, Extra Standard, or Standard. Naturally, I didn't want to pay the top price for the cheapest quality. "Where's the label?" I asked, and the gloomy gentleman looked me in the eye.

"What do you know about labels?" he asked me, and I explained that it was part of my business to know about labels, and to tell other homemakers about them.

"You have my sympathy," said the man. "The fool women who come in here don't want to know anything about labels." He slammed the tomatoes back on the shelf, and brought out six other cans -- the Extra Standard quality I wanted.

"The label's right there on the can," he said, "but the fool women don't know what it means when they see it. I've tried to get 'em interested, but they won't listen. If they want to waste their money, it's no affair of mine."

With that remark, we closed the conversation, and I went home. I told my Next Door Neighbor about the grocer.

"He'd had a poor breakfast," she said. "Maybe the coffee was cold. By the way," she said suddenly, "what are the labels on canned tomatoes? I always buy the can with the reddest tomato on the wrapper."

Well -- just for a moment I wanted to go back and shake the hand of the gloomy grocer. However, since that wasn't feasible, I gave a lecture on canned tomatoes to my next door neighbor, who admitted that she was ignorant, but eager to learn.

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"Let's have the ABC's of canned tomatoes," she said, and she listened attentively while I told her what I knew.

If you were judging canned tomatoes, I told her, you'd find three distinct grades. The Department of Agriculture rates them as Grades A, B, and C. The canners and dealers call them Fancy, Extra Standard, and Standard. Sometimes you'll find these Government grades on the label, but alas, there is no uniform system of showing the quality of the tomatoes on the outside of the can.

Now let's take three cans of tomatoes, of three grades, and see how they differ, I continued (trying to make the lecture as graphic as possible). Here's a can labeled Fancy. The U. S. Department of Agriculture would rate it Grade A, the best. Some canners also use the label Grade A. Open the can and you will see the finest quality tomatoes, the pick of the crop, smooth, red, well-flavored, ripened on the vine. These tomatoes were grown right near a commercial cannery, so it was easy to catch them at just the right moment of ripeness. They were packed whole, or nearly whole, with skin and core removed, and no blemishes of any kind. They deserve to command the top price. After draining, the solid tomato meat in this can should weigh from 65 to 70 per cent of the whole contents.

Now let's open the second can, Grade B, known to the trade as "Extra Standard." They're not quite so good-looking as the Grade A product, but very nice, just the same. Sometimes tomatoes of Grade B quality are put up in "solid pack." "Solid pack" tomatoes may contain just as much solid meat as Grade A tomatoes. The chief difference is that the tomatoes in the "solid pack" are not whole. Of course, they should cost less than the "Fancy" quality.

Our third can is labeled "Grade C," or Standard. It probably contains the "field run" of the crop -- tomatoes packed as they come, in various stages of ripeness -- or unripeness. They're lighter in color than the more expensive grades. You'll notice some pale red and yellowish and greenish-red parts. Grade C tomatoes should sell for less than either of the two higher grades. If the can is not labeled, ask your grocer. It's a good idea to know what you're buying, so you won't pay Grade A prices for Grade C tomatoes.

Grade C tomatoes, the cheapest, have come to the aid of many a food budget when times were hard. For no matter what the price, the food value is the same. Cheap, and at the same time wholesome, Grade C tomatoes are excellent in soup, in scalloped dishes with bread crumbs and spaghetti, and in sauces for meat, or eggs, or potatoes. You can stew them with okra, or with onions, or celery, and you can use them with Swiss steak or braised liver. The juice, strained, is good for the baby, who must have his vitamin C. When you cook tomatoes, I reminded my neighbor, cook them for as short a time as possible, for heat diminishes the vitamin C content.

"I know all about vitamins and cooking," said my friend mildly. "Labels are the subject of this discourse."

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So I went back to labels, and summarized the important facts about canned tomatoes. They are graded according to quality: Grade A, or Fancy; Grade B, or Extra Standard; and Grade C, or Standard. The differences in grade are measured by color, which is a good indicator of flavor; by the size of the pieces; and by the proportion of juice to solids. The juice in a can of tomatoes is pure tomato juice. The law forbids addition of water. All canned tomatoes are wholesome food, regardless of grade or price.

"Thank you," said my friend. "I shall buy some canned tomatoes tomorrow, and astonish and delight your pessimistic grocer with my newly-acquired knowledge. If that doesn't restore his faith in women shoppers -- he's a sad case indeed."

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